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SPORTS

Middlesex League champion Winchester exceeds expectations on the gridiron with history-making moments in 2025

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR

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Winchester High senior quarterback Ronan O'Connell (12) surveys the field during the Thanksgiving Day game against host Woburn. COURTESY PHOTO/JEN JOHNSON

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The Winchester High football team might have fallen short of its ultimate Gillette Stadium goal, but there was still plenty to celebrate.

The Red & Black, the fourth overall seed in Division 2, racked up 11 wins, including two in the playoffs, before dropping their only game of the season to top-seeded Catholic Memorial in the state semifinal round. They then bounced right back to double up host Woburn in the annual Thanksgiving Day game, 28-14. It was their second straight win over the Tanners, and now lead in the overall series, 57-55-12.

The high-powered Winchester offense ended up scoring 450 points in 12 games, while the defense only gave up 160. After all of that, the Winchester boys were able to win the program's first Middlesex League title since 1990.

After beating host Woburn for the second straight year on Thanksgiving, the Winchester High football team poses for a photo one last time together on the gridiron. COURTESY PHOTO/MAI HARRISON

"We exceeded most of the (goals) that we (had lined up for ourselves) coming into the season regarding the overall (offensive) numbers," said Coach Wally Dembowski. "We were unsure of replacing three offensive line positions, but (their replacements) all produced at consistent, fantastic levels. The offensive production allowed our defense to be aggressive and attack."

Three of the team's dynamic offensive stars are seniors, and they all turned in one last memorable performance on Thanksgiving. Nicky Rotondi was the leading rusher with 167 yards on 24 carries, Ted Budreski cau[illegible] passes for 162 yards and four touchdowns. Quarterback Ronan O'Connell

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completed 12 passes out of 19 attempts for 230 yards, four of which went for touchdowns to Budreski.

On defense, senior lineman Chris Russo, filling in for injured captain Bryan Harrison at middle linebacker, collected five solo tackles and assisted on four others. Senior lineman Shaun Garrett was credited with three tackles. Senior defensive back Quinn Pimentel had three tackles, one for a loss, and he also helped out on another one. Rotondi, playing linebacker, had four solos and teamed up for another one, while also breaking up a pass to prevent another long drive by Woburn. Senior cornerback Will Nelson was responsible for four tackles. Junior defensive back Will Bolognese intercepted one pass – his sixth this season – and also had three tackles.

By the numbers

Senior captain Gianni DePrimeo was the team's leading rusher this year with 1,702 yards on 161 carries, while also establishing a new school record for touchdowns with 25.

Summing up the season, Dembowski has no complaints.

"The season was fantastic," he said. "Our 11 wins this year tied a school record, and the players worked extremely hard to get the job done, while the coaches were able to push them past their comfort levels. One of our goals this year was winning the league. Done. Another one was to go deeper in the playoffs beyond the quarterfinals. Done. Thanksgiving was another goal. Done. We also wanted to win the Super Bowl, but CM unfortunately got in the way."

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Winchester High senior running back Nicky Rotondi (3) plows through the line for additional yards during the Thanksgiving Day game against host Woburn. COURTESY PHOTO/JEN JOHNSON

Dembowski said that this group was his most accomplished team in the last three years, with many of these same players suiting up for the varsity in each of those seasons. Among other things, the Red & Black secured their first Middlesex League title in 35 years.

“That was an awesome way for these seniors to end their high school football careers. They just missed winning the league title in each of the last two seasons,” Dembowski said. “It will be hard to replace these 25 seniors on this year’s team, because they each contributed something (positive) to the program the last four years.”

The veteran Winchester coach compared this year’s team with its 2019 counterparts, who were also really competitive, albeit with heartbreaking results. They lost to Tewksbury in the Division 2 quarterfinals by one point, before missing the league title by one game.

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But the coach remembers that squad beating Woburn in the 2018 Thanksgiving Day game in overtime, despite the below zero temperatures, which set them up nicely for 2019.

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Comings and goings

“The bar has been set extremely high for next year’s returnees, who will have to work hard to prepare for each opponent's best effort,” said Dembowski.

Sophomore Nolan Byrne, coming off knee surgery, will look to fill the running back void without the likes of DePrimeo and Rotondi around.

Peter Alexopoulos is slated to be next year’s signal caller. But he already has varsity experience, having seen some time behind center the last two years.

Dembowski, however, admits that he and his coaching staff need to find four offensive linemen to fill out next year’s group of blockers, and it also won’t be easy to replace wide receivers Ryan Martin, Will Nelson and Budreski, plus captain Mike Ficociello at tight end. His sophomore brother Joseph could be slotted nicely into his spot.

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Winchester High sophomore running back Nolan Byrne (28) looks for a first down during the Thanksgiving Day game against host Woburn. COURTESY PHOTO/JEN JOHNSON

If there are holes on offense, the defense will also be on “high alert” without Harrison at middle linebacker, according to the coach, not to mention William Mango and Pimentel at outside linebacker, Budreski and DePrimeo at cornerback and Rotondi at strong safety. The coach will also have a whole new defensive line in 2026.

Dembowski expects that the special teams should once again be reliable next year, led by Bolognese, the team’s trusted placekicker and punter. Long snapper Cole Deason is also coming back. Andrew Haigis, Eddie Sim, Jack Lennon, Ben Adams, Evan Berg, Mike Beauvais, Henry Nagler, Dominic Vozzella and Patrick Winn are expected to step up as the team’s veterans next year.

Awards season

The Red & Black got together one last time on Saturday morning for a team brunch and awards ceremony to celebrate this memorable

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season.

Harrison was the recipient of the coaches' award. The Doc Hines Lineman Award went to Lucas Sekino and Shaun Garrett, which was voted on by the players. The Mr. Provizano Award for team spirit was given to DePrimeo. This too was voted on by the players. DePrimeo was also the Liberty Division MVP in the Middlesex League. He joined Harrison and O'Connell on the All-League squad, as well. To cap off his league honors, DePrimeo was a league all-star, along with teammates Russo, Harrison, Budreski, Bolognese, Sekino and O'Connell.

As a result of these league awards, all of these players were presented with either trophies or certificates in recognition of their extraordinary seasons following the Saturday Brunch.

Joe McConnell is a longtime, award-winning sports editor for numerous North Shore publications. He began covering Winchester sports for the News last November.

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Winchester boys basketball heads to Bridgewater-Raynham for Sweet 16 game after beating Lexington in postseason opener

It was the third meeting this year between Middlesex League boys basketball rivals Lexington (16-5, 11th seed) and Winchester (17-4, 22nd seed). They split the first two during the regular season, thus making this Round of 32 postseason matchup the impromptu rubber game of this year's series, with the

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Winchester wrestling enjoys Top 10 finish at state divisional meet; senior captains move on to All-States

After the Winchester High qualified wrestlers competed hard over two days last weekend (Feb. 20, 21) in the State Division 1 Meet at North Andover High School, Mother Nature gave them a break to rest and recuperate with Monday's blizzard that resulted in two days off from school. There

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Winchester boys hockey advances to the Sweet 16 after beating Wachusett in the tournament opener

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With postseason starting Friday night, WHS boys hoc English, Sarpong, Bu Middlesex League elite

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The Winchester High boys hockey team (12-9-2), the 17th seed, edged the 16th-seeded Wachusett Regional Mountaineers (18-2-1), 5-4 in a Round of 32 Division 1 state tournament game at Westborough's Northstar Ice Arena on Feb. 25. The Red & Black will now take on top seed Catholic Memorial (18-2-1)

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The Winchester High boys basketball team, the 22nd seed, will take on Middlesex League rival Lexington, the 11th seed, to begin the Division 1 state tournament in the Round of 32 on Friday night, Feb. 27, starting at 6 p.m. These teams are so evenly matched, beginning with the

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Latest

FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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